

Getting inside the artist's studio

Lesieur opens doors for fifth season

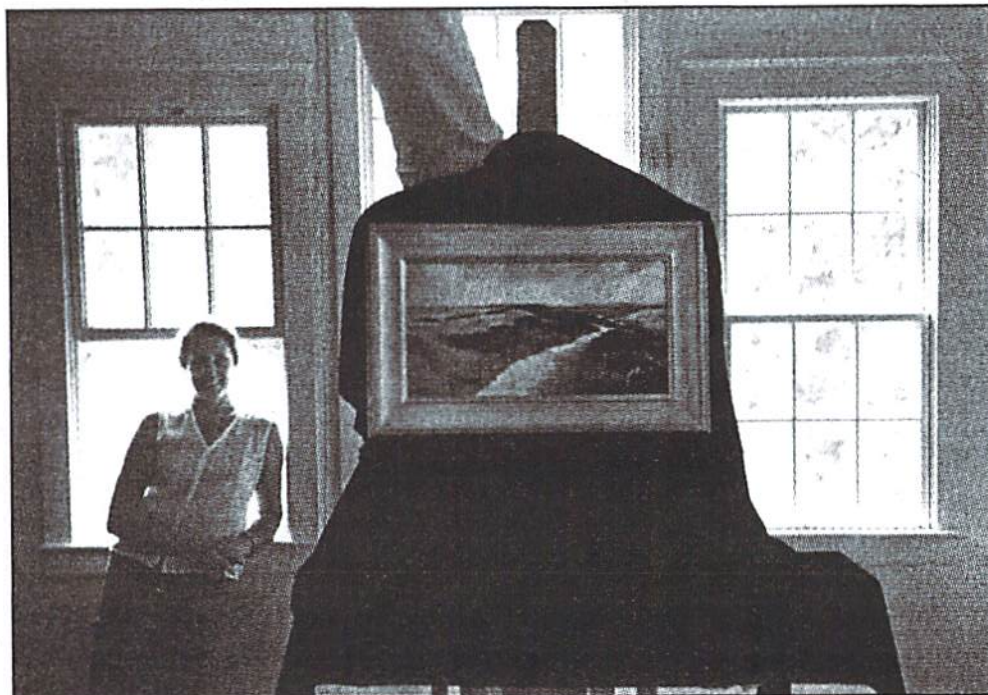
By Caroline Dufault
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Just inside the entrance of artist Bettina Lesieur's home studio in Duxbury, a dark wood staircase leads up to an airy loft of white walls and sunlit windows.

Her wooden easel immediately draws one's attention, and some of her paintings of sun-drenched marshes and winding beach paths are scattered around its base. Below the loft is Lesieur's backyard garden, filled with periwinkle hydrangeas, a vine-covered trellis and a small stone fountain built into a hill.

For the past five years, Lesieur has been holding a special summer show out of her studio. This year's exhibit is a collection of 80 new pieces that range from European scenes of Provence and Italy to local vistas on the South Shore.

Although Lesieur has been holding winter shows for the past 14 years, the relatively new summer exhibitions are a way for art lovers, collectors and South Shore locals to visit her cottage studio and walk through her gar-



STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS BERNSTEIN

Bettina Lesieur with "Road to the Gurnet," which will be auctioned off the night of her gallery opening to benefit NEADS, a non-profit organization that trains and provides dogs for the deaf and disabled.

den on a summer day.

The gallery opening will be Friday Aug. 1, from 6 to 10 p.m. Visitors will be able to meander through Lesieur's two-floor, barn-style studio and see her exhibition while enjoying live piano music, food and wine.

"It's a circular experience," said Lesieur. "People can walk through my gallery, listen to the music coming in through all the open windows, get a drink from the porch bar, then sit outside in the garden and enjoy the night."

The show will continue on Aug.

2 and 3, as well as Aug. 8 to 10, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Viewings of the exhibit are also possible by appointment.

Lesieur, who grew up in Canton, attended the University of Maine for pre-veterinary medicine after she turned down a full scholarship to Rhode Island School of Design at the age of 17.

"I knew at the time that my artistic abilities were inherent," she said. "I knew I could always come back to it so I wanted to go to college and try something else."

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Bettina Lesieur



Bettina Lesieur takes time out from hanging her exhibit.

STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS BERNSTEIN

However, after graduating from college, Lesieur realized that medicine was not her calling. After moving to Maine and living there for 12 years, Lesieur moved to Duxbury, where she has lived for the past 15 years. She began showing her work in galleries in Boston and Martha's Vineyard, but felt limited at times. After having some of her pieces shown at the Willoughby Gallery on Martha's Vineyard, a home that sometimes serves as an art gallery, Lesieur was inspired to create her own studio.

Lesieur's husband, Jeffrey Gray, designed and built her home studio 11 years ago after Lesieur decided she wanted to work and exhibit her pieces all out of her own home.

"There's a freedom to painting what I like," she said. "I like the spontaneity of being able to do what I like to do."

Over the years, Lesieur has been the recipient of the Grumbacher Art Award and recognized by organizations such as the Beacon Hill Art Walk, Andover Art Guild and the Newport Art Festival among others.

Both of Lesieur's parents were artists. Her father Robert was a commercial artist and a teacher of commercial design at Boston University, and her mother Maria was a fashion illustrator who also taught at Boston's School of Fashion Design.

"My father was my mentor," she said. "He always told me that you never stop learning. The more you paint the more you get into your own. It's a constant learning experience."

Lesieur also shares her talent with aspiring artists. For the past 16 years, she has been holding semi-private lessons out of a separate studio, teaching 100 students a week during the school year.

"Through teaching I continue to learn," she said. "It helps me keep things fresh."

Inspired by her passion for gardening, her love of traveling and

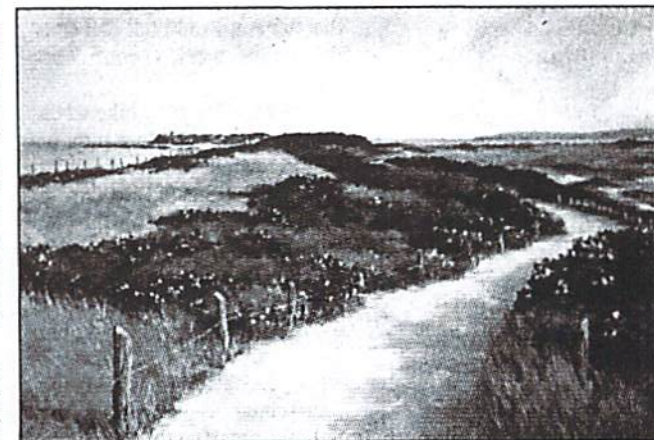
her appreciation for nature, Lesieur loves to create a sense of depth in her pieces, allowing her viewers to be drawn into the landscapes.

"My father noticed one time how I always seem to have some kind of pathway, whether it be a river, stream, or dirt path, that just leads the eye in," she said.

Lesieur's signature piece of this summer's show is a scene from Gurnet Point in Duxbury titled "Road to the Gurnet," which will be auctioned off the night of her gallery opening. A percentage of the proceeds will be donated to NEADS, a non-profit organization that trains and provides dogs for the deaf and disabled. Lesieur said she knows of two families in Duxbury with NEADS dogs, one of which has a child she taught. The other family has a child who had her sister, Christina Montalto, as a teacher.

"Although putting together my own show is a lot of work, I love all the different aspects of it and in the end it's all worth it," said Lesieur, who was involved in every detail, from designing the invitations to choosing the wines for her opening party.

When asked about the time it takes to finish her pieces, Lesieur replied, "Fifty years. It's taken me 50 years to get to this point."



STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS BERNSTEIN

"Road to the Gurnet," the painting which will be auctioned off to benefit NEADS.